

# LANDLINE

A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife land management newsletter

Summer 2004

## Clear policy direction needed for lands management

By Jeff Koenings, PhD., WDFW Director

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has a 65 – year legacy of acquiring land for fish and wildlife and related recreation. That is a credit to our predecessors. Their vision and commitment to ensure natural habitat was preserved in perpetuity is a major reason why Washington is a great place to live.

Without a doubt, land acquisition has been – and will continue to be – an important management tool not only for WDFW, but other natural resource agencies.

But what criteria should drive our decision-making? What is our overarching lands strategy?

Those are the questions confronting WDFW as the agency embarks on the development of a new, comprehensive lands policy called **“Lands 20/20: A Vision for the Future.”** The goal is to develop clear guidelines to steer future WDFW land acquisitions – and the management of those acquisitions.

It is an ambitious task, and we will need your input to make it happen.

Historically, our acquisitions have been as diverse as the species they support. They include riparian areas, forest, shrubsteppe, steppe and desert landscapes, as well as saltwater estuaries, shorelines, lakes, ponds, streams and other wetlands. Acreages have been very large – over 100,000 acres to support big game herds and diverse habitats. And they have been very small – 10 to 20 acres

to support a single habitat or an endangered species.

In recent years WDFW has spent more than \$100 million purchasing more than 100,000 acres of important habitat lands throughout the state. Much of that has come since 1990 when the Legislature began making funds available to protect the state's most important lands before they could be converted to other uses.

This program, known as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and administered by the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, has been an incredible source of capital acquisition funds for WDFW and other state and local government entities. At the same time, WDFW and other agencies also have benefited from the ability to use WWRP funds as leverage for federal acquisition grants, most of which require a state match.

I think it's fair to say our land acquisition approach has been straightforward and simple: If the property had value for fish and wildlife, and funds were available, WDFW considered purchasing it. That approach allowed us to acquire an

incredible diversity and scale of properties for fish and wildlife and recreation. However, with successes have come drawbacks. For example, over the years we have learned that fragmented parcels are often not functional as fish and wildlife habitat. Should fragmented parcels be purchased or should they be “blocked” with existing larger parcels?

In addition, our approach to date has burdened us with a very large and difficult to fund stewardship responsibility. The need to keep the properties functional for the purpose they were originally purchased has raised another question: Should future acquisitions be accompanied by operational dollars? WDFW can't possibly expect to own, or even manage, every piece of property that has value for fish and wildlife. We owe it to ourselves and Washington's citizens to be as efficient and effective as possible. We must become more strategic so our attention and resources are focused on the most threatened habitats and species and recreational access opportunities.

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## Timber thinning helps wildlife while reducing fire and disease risk

A timber thinning operation on part of WDFW's 50,000-acre L.T. Murray Wildlife Area west of Ellensburg in Kittitas County was designed to improve wildlife habitat, but has also significantly reduced the risk of wildfire and disease.

WDFW's area manager Cindi Confer says that when the first 140 acres of understory timber in the Joe Watt Canyon portion of the wildlife area were thinned successfully last fall, a second contract to thin an additional 780 acres was awarded to Ponderay Valley Fibre, Inc. this summer.

WDFW forester Doug Kuehn, who planned the thinning, gave



Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officials a tour of the area, knowing they might be

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Land Line is produced by the Lands Division and Public Affairs Office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

## Clear policy direction *(continued from page 1)*

And we need to do a better job of explaining what we're doing, why we're doing it and how it could impact citizens' lives.

In recent years, natural resource agencies have come under increasing scrutiny by state and local policymakers and others who have charged that some land acquisitions have resulted in valuable property being removed from the tax rolls. Even though WDFW makes a payment in lieu of taxes to counties where we own land, counties argue that in some cases that does not replace revenues that would have been generated if the land had been developed.

Our critics have also contended that we have simply purchased more land than we can properly manage. This criticism led us to begin implementing a "Good Neighbor" approach to lands management to improve relations with

adjacent landowners and make sure we worked better together.

Right now, our goal is to have a draft of the WDFW lands policy ready by fall to present to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. The document's core tenet is land acquisitions should serve one of two central purposes: species biodiversity and protection, or accessibility for recreational purposes. And in either case, we must be accountable to our neighbors for the stewardship responsibility and for the effective use of state and federal funds.

We've already begun to meet with major stakeholder groups, including the Washington Association of Counties, The Nature Conservancy, the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, the Farm Bureau, the Washington Conservation Commission, and representatives from

our Lands Management Advisory Council to get initial feedback on draft documents. In coming weeks, we'll be continuing those discussions to obtain additional feedback.

We also want to hear from you. Once a draft policy is developed, it will be available for public comment and posted on our website. In the meantime, if you want to share your ideas, please contact Margen Carlson (360/902-2229, [www.carlsmc@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:www.carlsmc@dfw.wa.gov)), or WDFW Lands Division Manager Mark Quinn (360/902-2402 [www.quinnmq@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:www.quinnmq@dfw.wa.gov)). Both are working with me to develop the new policy.

Please take the time to share your insights on this important subject. The policy is likely to play a major role in the years to come in shaping our state's fish and wildlife resources.

Thank you.

## Who's who in WDFW lands management

The WDFW lands management staff, from Olympia headquarters to the field, work in various ways to maximize the value and use of fish and wildlife properties.

As a division of the Wildlife Management Program, lands staff manage Wildlife Areas, work with private landowners in upland restoration and recreational access programs, provide operation and maintenance services, and administer real estate services and other legal transactions. Here's who they are:

### Headquarters (statewide responsibility):

Mark Quinn, *Lands Division Manager*  
Paul Dahmer, *Wildlife Area Section Manager*  
Edd Bracken, *Statewide Range Specialist (located in Ellensburg)*  
Kelly Craig, *Wildlife Area Planner*  
Dave Heimer, *Statewide Weed Management Coordinator (located in Tacoma)*  
Doug Kuehn, *Statewide Forester (located in Ellensburg)*  
Lonnie Landrie, *Statewide Forest Roads Coordinator (located in Ellensburg)*  
Dan Budd, *Real Estate Services Manager*  
Elyse Kane, *Property Management Supervisor*  
Todd Walker, *Acquisition Supervisor*  
Dave Hilberg, *Accountant*  
Don Miller, *Chief Appraiser*  
Alice Beals, *Lands Agent*  
Jennifer Mansur, *Right of Way Agent*  
June Skye, *Support Services*  
Steve Sherlock, *Recreational Access Areas/ Washington Conservation Corps*  
Don Larsen, *Private Lands/Farm Bill Coordinator (located in Spokane)*  
Gina Correa, *Landowner Incentive Program Manager*

### Wildlife Areas

**Eastern Region:** Asotin Creek, Chief Joseph – Bob Dice, *Manager*  
Shana Kozusko, *Asst. Manager*  
Sherman Creek, Le Clerc Creek – Joe McCanna, *Manager*  
Swanson Lakes – Juli Anderson, *Manager* / Mike Finch, *Asst. Manager*  
Wooten – Gary Stendal, *Manager*

**North Central Region:** Columbia Basin – Greg Fitzgerald, *Manager*  
Brian Cole, *Asst. Manager* / Laura Cooke, *Wildlife Biologist*  
Roger Nelson, *Vegetation Mgmt. Specialist*  
Methow – Jim Mountjoy, *Manager* / Robert Wattlin, *Habitat Technician*  
Scotch Creek – Jim Olson, *Manager* / Brian DuPont, *Asst. Manager*  
Mike Nelson, *Habitat Technician*  
Sinlahekin, Driscoll Island, Chiliwist – Dale Swedberg, *Manager*  
Don Garrett, *Asst. Manager*  
Wells, Sagebrush Flat, Chelan – Marc Hallet, *Manager* / Dan Peterson, *Asst. Manager* / Fidel Rios, *Habitat Technician*

**South Central Region:** Colockum – Pete Lopushinsky, *Manager*  
L.T. Murray/Wenas – Cindy Confer, *Manager* / Jody Taylor, *Asst. Manager*  
Wayne Hunt, *Wildlife Biologist*  
Oak Creek – John McGowan, *Manager* / Bruce Berry, *Asst. Manager*  
Sunnyside, Snake River – Rocky Ross, *Manager* / Robby Sak, *Asst. Manager*

**North Puget Sound Region:** Lake Terrell, Tennant Lake – Tom Reed, *Manager*  
Skagit, Skagit River, Stillwater, Ebey Island, Cherry Valley, Spencer Island, Crescent Lake – John Garrett, *Manager*

**Southwest Region:** Cowlitz – Mark Grabski, *Manager* / Richard Vanderlip, *Asst. Manager* / Casey Morris, *Habitat Technician*  
Klickitat – Martin Ellenburg, *Manager*

St. Helens, Shillapoo, Vancouver Lake – Brian Calkins, *Manager*

**Coastal Region:** Olympic, Chehalis, Johns River – Jim Gerchak, *Manager*

Jim Gallegos, *Asst. Manager*

McNeil Island, South Puget Sound, Scatter Creek – Richard Kessler, *Manager*

### Operation, Maintenance and Acquisition:

Brian Trickel, *Eastside Lands Supervisor (Spokane)*  
Cindy McMinn, *Lands Agent (Yakima)*  
Peter Hill, *Special Projects Lands Agent (Wenatchee)*  
Scott Young, *Habitat/Access Technician (Spokane)*  
Terry Folkins, *Habitat/Access Technician (Asotin)*  
Kerry Taylor, *Habitat/Access Technician (Ephrata)*  
Jerry Francisco, *Habitat/Access Technician (Yakima)*  
Terry Legg, *Westside Lands Supervisor (Montesano)*  
Kye Iris, *Lands Agent (Mill Creek)*  
Todd Martin, *Habitat/Access Technician (Mill Creek)*  
Ross Calvert, *Habitat/Access Technician (Dupont)*  
Brad Otto, *Habitat/Access Technician (Mill Creek)*  
Charles Leidy, *Lands Agent (Vancouver)*  
Chris Spangler, *Habitat/Access Technician (Vancouver)*  
Bert Loomis, *Lands Agent (Montesano)*  
Brian Mitchell, *Habitat/Access Technician (Montesano)*  
Peter Lapham, *Laborer (Montesano)*

### Eastern Washington Upland Restoration (UWR) and Recreational Access:

**Eastern Region:** Joe McCanna, *UWR Biologist 3 (St. John)*

Todd Baarstad, *UWR Biologist 2 (Davenport)*

Steve Henry, *UWR Biologist 2 (Clarkston)*

Scott Rasley, *UWR Biologist 2 (Walla Walla)*

**Northcentral Region:** Gretchen Fitzgerald, *UWR Biologist 3 (Ephrata)*

John Cotton, *UWR Biologist 2 (Moses Lake)*

Ron Fox, *UWR Biologist 3 (East Wenatchee)*

Eric Braaten, *UWR Biologist 2 (Electric City)*

**Southcentral Region:** Steve DeGrood, *UWR Biologist 3 (Yakima)*

Don Hand, *UWR Biologist 2 (Kennewick)*

Mike Keller, *UWR Biologist 2 (Pasco)*

# WDFW pays in lieu tax

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) checks totaling \$641,059.63 were sent to Washington counties this spring.

The annual payments are in lieu of property taxes on WDFW-owned lands and assessments for fire protection, weed control, irrigation, and other local services on both WDFW-owned and managed lands.

Each county can either retain game violation fines and forfeitures collected within the county, or elect to receive Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) on WDFW property of at least 100 contiguous acres. Most counties that have significant WDFW acreage choose to receive the in lieu payments. In most cases, the payments are equivalent to or more than counties would receive if the property was privately owned and held in open space classification for agriculture or forestry activities.

**WDFW is the only state agency that makes in-lieu tax payments on property it owns and manages.**

The table shown here lists the Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT), based on the number of acres eligible for PILT, and assessment payments that counties received from WDFW this year. Counties with WDFW acreage that show no payments have either not billed the agency for service assessments and/or have chosen to retain game violation fines rather than in lieu taxes. Variations in the taxes per listed acreages may indicate that not all acres are taxed and/or that not all are computed at the same rate. Assessments vary from county to county.

COUNTY	PILT	PILT ACRES	ASSESSMENTS
ADAMS	\$0.00		\$10,718.72
ASOTIN	\$22,297.61	29,277.88	\$0.00
BENTON	\$0.00		\$2,812.39
CHELAN	\$18,752.88	26,789.83	\$0.00
CLALLAM	\$0.00		\$1,204.41
CLARK	\$0.00		\$8,859.70
COLUMBIA	\$7,555.91	10,794.13	\$1,746.97
COWLITZ	\$0.00		\$834.82
FERRY	\$6,781.33	6,866.13	\$705.10
FRANKLIN	\$0.00		\$19,424.52
GARFIELD	\$4,839.98	6,914.26	\$553.14
GRANT	\$37,443.16	39,076.00	\$24,148.17
GRAYS HARBOR	\$7,473.66	3,248.00	\$0.00
KING	\$0.00		\$20,825.50
KITSAP	\$0.00		\$1,064.80
KITTITAS	\$115,909.16	148,762.02	\$5,703.34
Klickitat	\$21,416.95	13,106.35	\$760.26
LINCOLN	\$13,629.25	19,470.36	\$1,902.08
MASON	\$0.00		\$450.00
OKANOGAN	\$75,736.87	60,293.16	\$8,403.77
PACIFIC	\$0.00		\$333.80
PEND ORIELLE	\$3,308.65	614.00	\$0.00
PIERCE	\$0.00		\$7,909.34
SAN JUAN	\$0.00		\$275.00
SKAGIT	\$0.00		\$25,157.40
SNOHOMISH	\$0.00		\$10,735.78
SPOKANE	\$0.00		\$1,018.75
THURSTON	\$5,107.61	1,131.00	\$11,451.18
WALLA WALLA	\$0.00		\$12.00
WHATCOM	\$0.00		\$69.24
YAKIMA	\$88,792.82	70,130.23	\$44,933.61
TOTALS	\$429,045.84	436,473.35	\$212,013.79
GRAND TOTAL	\$641,059.63		

## Private landowners can benefit from hunter access programs

With over half of the land in Washington state in private ownership, it's no wonder that hunters have identified access to private lands as one of their top interests.

That's what WDFW game managers heard during initial review of their 2003-2009 Game Management Plan last year. Since then they have been working to increase hunter access to private lands through programs that benefit landowners, too.

"A lot of the concern came from western Washington hunters who have seen access changes on private timberlands or have grown dissatisfied with westside upland game bird and waterfowl hunting," explained WDFW game program manager Dave Ware. "But we've also heard from landowners, too."

Ware and staff are addressing the issue with a proposal that is undergoing public review late this summer and early this fall, will be

submitted to the Governor's office for approval in December, and will hopefully be passed on to the Legislature in January. It includes changes to the current Private Lands Wildlife Management Area (PLWMA) program and the Feel-Free-to-Hunt, Register-to-Hunt and Hunt-by-Written Permission sign program, and a surcharge on hunting licenses to fund a new landowner payment program.

Ware said a "test" of the proposed landowner payment program was made possible with a one-time legislative appropriation this year. Those funds are being used to pay 14 southeast Washington landowners to improve pheasant habitat and allow public access on their lands this fall. The pilot project opens up more than 9,000 acres to hunters.

"It might be our template for leasing property for hunting access in the future," Ware said. "But we would need to establish an ongoing source of funds, like through a surcharge on

hunting licenses, because we couldn't do it with our current budget."

Ware explained that possibly a five dollar addition to each hunting license would go into a private lands access account to cover payments to landowners who improve habitat and allow public access. A hunter opinion survey conducted last year showed that most would be willing to pay up to \$10 for additional access.

"We'll see how the pilot project goes this fall," Ware said, "so we can determine what's needed for an ongoing program."

Meanwhile, the 12-year-old PLWMA program is being modified to address both landowner and hunter concerns identified by a hunter access task group. The program currently involves three landowners – Merrill and Ring's Pysht Tree Farm in Clallam County, Rainer Timber Company in Pierce County, and David Stevens' Buckrun Limited in Grant County. Each operates a little differently, from



# Washington's Wildlife Areas: The Skagit

With at least 90,400 visitor days of recreation a year, the Skagit Wildlife Area in northwest Washington is one of the most used of all the 64 WDFW wildlife areas.

Most of the Skagit's 15,000-plus acres are on Fir Island and adjacent to Skagit Bay, between the mouths of the north and south forks of the glacier-fed Skagit River in northwest Washington's Skagit and Snohomish counties. The area is primarily tidelands, intertidal marsh habitat, and diked upland segments of the Skagit River Delta, most at elevations of five feet or less.

The Skagit Delta is one of the major waterfowl wintering areas in the Pacific Flyway. Thousands of migrating shorebirds use the intertidal zones, drawing more birdwatchers than any other single wildlife area in the state.

It's also the most heavily used public waterfowl hunting area in western Washington. The Skagit's popularity is no doubt due in part to its proximity to Washington's largest urban center – Seattle is just 60 miles to the south and Mount Vernon is just eight miles to the north. Access is easy with Interstate Highway 5 just 2-1/2 miles to the east.



*Paul Bannick/paulbannick.com*

The area's bird checklist includes 180 species. In addition to all the water-related birds, there are osprey, eagles, hawks, owls, and a myriad of seasonal songbirds. Black-tailed deer, coyote, raccoon, opossum, skunk, beaver, and muskrat are regularly seen. River otter, red fox, and harbor seals are sometimes seen. Reptiles and amphibians include several snake, turtle, frog and salamander species.

Common, ghost and brown shrimp are abundant, and the eastern soft shell clam historically provided sport clam digging on the Skagit. The rivers and estuarine systems provide very

valuable habitat for many anadromous fish species, including endangered Chinook salmon, chum, coho and pink salmon, steelhead, Dolly Varden and coastal cutthroat trout. Fishing for some of these, plus largemouth bass and black crappie, is popular throughout the Skagit.

The Skagit has many water access sites and footbridges that lend themselves to other kinds of use. Canoeing, kayaking, hiking and nature photography are favorites. Local schools, scout packs, Audubon chapters and others make trips to the area regularly. The Skagit is also one of several western Washington pheasant release sites for limited fall hunting.



*Paul Bannick/paulbannick.com*

The area that is now Skagit Delta was deep water after the last glacial age. Over the years, siltation from the Skagit River slowly filled the bay and began building the delta. Near the mouth of the North Fork of the Skagit River, archaeologists discovered a circular native American dwelling with remains dating back 2,500 years, indicating a culture dependent upon fishing and hunting. Prior to the 1850's, the area was extensively tidal marsh from just south and west of Mount Vernon to the deeper area of Skagit Bay. Five Native American tribes or bands of 100 to 300 persons each inhabited the area.

By the arrival of the first non-native settlers in the 1860's, the delta was a huge salt marsh, probably with mud flats at its outer border. In 1864, 100 acres were diked to provide a farm area protected from floodwaters, thus beginning an era of agricultural land use. Farming success made diking an accepted land reclamation procedure. In 1881, the first diking districts were formed to administer building and maintaining dikes. Throughout the early 1900s, extensive diking

converted 90 percent of the river delta from salt marsh to agricultural lands, most in grain crops. Wild pheasant hunting was excellent in the Skagit Valley, but "clean farming" changes over time, mostly to dairy and vegetables, reduced pheasant habitat and by 1950 pheasant hunting declined.

State wildlife officials recognized the Skagit Delta as unique and public acquisition was pursued to ensure its preservation and make it available as a multiple-use recreation area. The first purchase of today's Skagit Wildlife Area – part of the lower South Fork of the Skagit River – was made in 1948. In 1959, the U.S. government traded over 7,400 acres of intertidal marsh and tidelands on Skagit Bay for lands the state purchased in eastern Washington. From 1960 through 1966, eight more acquisition projects were completed. Additional purchases were made in 1973, 1974, and most recently in 1992, to bring the total to more than 15,000 acres. A majority of the purchases have been made through Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Funds, state wildlife funds, and from grants administered by the Washington Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation funds.

Current wildlife area manager John Garrett has spent about half of his life on the Skagit, assigned to his caretaking role in 1976. He's observed many changes, including several large floods over the years, but the most significant has been the endangered species listing of Puget Sound Chinook salmon in 1999. That action has many ramifications up and down the coast, including restoration of estuary function to the Skagit and Samish river deltas.

Much of the Skagit Wildlife Area's historical estuary habitat is blocked by dikes and drainage gates constructed before WDFW's acquisition in the 1950's. These structures not only block fish access to upstream habitat, but also influence downstream habitat by reducing the tidal flushing of the channel. Scientists estimate the loss of about 72 percent of the historical estuarine delta is the single most significant limiting factor for Chinook salmon production.

"Restoring the intertidal estuarine habitat for young salmon is a key

## **Private landowners can benefit** *(continued from page 3)*

access to general season hunting to select permits by species, but all must file "management plans" with WDFW.

"The timber companies really just want us to help manage hunters on their property," Ware said. "We're thinking of shifting the program to a controlled permit program that might also address game damage issues in some areas, and dropping the management plan requirement."

Review of WDFW's private lands access sign program has shown that the Hunt-by-Written-Permission system is most popular with landowners (compared to Feel-Free-to-Hunt and Register-to-Hunt.) All three types require written agreements between WDFW and cooperators, and include WDFW staff posting signs on property boundaries and providing game law enforcement patrol in the area. The program has been successful in opening several hundred thousand acres of

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands in eastern Washington to hunters.

The Feel-Free-to-Hunt system provides less control over who hunts, but it also relieves the landowner of direct contact with hunters. The Register-to-Hunt system allows access only at designated points where hunters sign in and are limited by parking spaces or numbered tags.

The Hunt-by-Written-Permission system requires the landowner's name and phone number on all posted signs. Hunters scouting the area call and make arrangements to meet the landowner to fill out a permission form that requires the hunter's name and address and hunting license number. A copy of the form is retained by the landowner and WDFW staff collect all forms at the end of the season to evaluate use.

"The biggest change that we're considering is to map all cooperators'

properties for ease of use by hunters," Ware said. Such maps would be available on WDFW's website and at regional offices.

In the past, landowners were reluctant to enter into access agreements if their property was "advertised" with maps, for fear of being inundated with too many hunters. But now, with more participation in the controlled access of the Hunt-by-Written-Permission system, that concern is not as keen. The idea is to have enough information to spread hunters over a wider area of the state.

"Mapping could actually save landowners time and grief, too," Ware said, "since hunters could make arrangements well ahead of hunting season openers."

For more information on private lands hunting access, contact George Tsukamoto at 360-902-2367.

## **Salmon protected by partnership**

Earlier this year the Jefferson Land Trust partnered with WDFW to purchase critical salmon habitat in the Salmon and Snow Creek Estuary in the Olympic Peninsula's Jefferson County.

The two organizations, partners in the larger "Chumsortium," combined grant money and expertise to acquire about 30 acres at the head of Discovery Bay. The area is considered the stronghold of the Strait of Juan de Fuca summer chum salmon.

The Chumsortium is a coalition of private and public entities with the goal of protecting and restoring salmon habitat. WDFW and the Jefferson County Conservation District are two of the public agencies involved, and the Land Trust is one of the private nonprofit partners.

"This is an excellent demonstration of what can be accomplished through the Chumsortium partnership," said Sue Patnude, WDFW's Olympic Peninsula Regional Director. "We are grateful for the Land Trust's help in purchasing this land."

WDFW wanted to purchase the land from the Garrison family but

didn't have enough money. The Land Trust had grant money from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, but needed matching money in order to use it. As partners in the Chumsortium, the two organizations work together on a regular basis and so were ready to join forces - and funding - to make the acquisition work.

WDFW has purchased another 122 acres contiguous to the Garrison property, and the Land Trust is negotiating for several more adjacent parcels. The goal is to acquire up to 300 acres to provide critical habitat for summer chum and other resident fish, shellfish, birds and mammals.

The property includes tidelands, wetlands and riparian corridors. While the habitat will be managed by WDFW, all partners in the Chumsortium are involved in the discussions leading up to land purchases. That involvement will continue as plans are developed for restoration and public access.

"The Chumsortium is the way we avoid duplication of efforts," said Sarah Spaeth, Program Manager for



Jefferson Land Trust. "It allows us all to work more efficiently and be more effective."

The Salmon and Snow Creek estuary is an important focus for conservation and restoration efforts. Hood Canal/ Strait of Juan de Fuca summer chum salmon are listed as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act and the estuary is the premier habitat for them.

Historically the area has been home to a sawmill, railroad track and trestle, and log rafting and shellfishing operations. The valley has been in agricultural use for over 100 years. Both creeks have been dredged and one relocated for agricultural uses.

In spite of the impact of these historical uses, the creeks have a relatively high salmon run and form the most intact estuary of its type on the Strait and Hood Canal. Summer chum returns to Salmon Creek far outnumber returns to all the other streams of the Strait combined. A hatchery on Salmon Creek provides brood stock for restoration of summer chum salmon in Chimacum Creek.

# The Skagit *(continued from page 4)*

factor in saving declining runs,” Garrett said. “And of course when you get a listed species of any kind, that becomes a management priority.”

Several restoration projects have been completed and others are being planned. The goal is to restore critical estuary function for salmon. Where possible some dikes have been reinforced while others have been removed entirely.

The first project was the 230-acre Deepwater Slough salmon restoration project on the Island Unit of the Skagit, completed in 2002 with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers mitigation funds.

Some agricultural fields for waterfowl hunting on the island were eliminated in exchange for a greatly enhanced dike system. Acres of estuary, that had been deprived of oxygen and nutrients when Deepwater Slough was diked and closed, were restored. The healthier estuary benefits not just salmon, but also waterfowl, shorebirds, and many other species of fish and wildlife.

With Washington’s Salmon Recovery Funding Board dollars in Skagit County directed to public lands first, other similar projects are likely down the road. The Wylie Slough salmon restoration project on 175 acres on the Skagit’s Fir Island Unit, (also called the “Headquarters Project”) is in the design, technical team review, and public input phase this year. The Fir Island Farm Unit includes the most extensive dike trail system and managed wetlands complex on the Skagit, now planted with grain for ducks and heavily used by waterfowl hunters.

Garrett acknowledged that there are vastly differing opinions about such projects. Some think the entire wildlife area should be returned to its natural state, and others don’t want the systems that are in place today changed at all.

Partners like the Skagit Watershed Council, Skagit River System Cooperative, Ducks Unlimited and others have stepped forward to help design the best habitat that benefits both fish and wildlife. The estuaries and freshwater wetlands used by salmon are extremely important to wintering and migrating waterfowl. Grain crops provide carbohydrates for waterfowl, but the invertebrates in the restored fresh and saltwater wetlands provide the protein necessary for the long migration to the breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada.

“We’re not going to eliminate waterfowl and waterfowl hunting,” Garrett said, “but some projects will change the style of hunting from on the ground to out of small boats during high tides. We’re working hard to develop and acquire replacement lands for these sites, so that the pedestrian or non-boating hunter or birdwatcher can access wildlife.”

Since only about 1,600 acres of the Skagit are “uplands,” or accessible on foot, Garrett has overseen several development projects on the Skagit since 1995. Some 410 acres in the Samish Unit underwent wetlands restoration and pond development with the help of Ducks Unlimited. Another 200-plus acres in the Leque Island Unit are farmed for waterfowl and pheasants. About 230 acres of the Skagit Bay/Fir Island Unit are specifically managed to provide for wintering snow geese, enjoyed by viewers from ADA-accessible trails.

“Our Hayton-Fir Island Farm Reserve has been a huge success story for a species that we manage together with Canada and Russia,” Garrett said. “Our neighbor, who owns an adjacent 275 acres, farms both his



and our land in winter wheat that draws and holds the geese.”

The 250-acre DeBay Slough Swan Reserve in the Nookachamps area just northeast of Mount Vernon is similarly managed for trumpeter and tundra swans – grain farmed to attract the big birds, with ADA-access for all viewers.

Today’s management of wildlife areas like the Skagit is a delicate balance, providing habitat for everything from endangered salmon to huntable populations of ducks. The Skagit will likely always be a destination waterfowl hunting and viewing area, but now it will also be a foundation for salmon recovery.

## Contract restoration work with WDFW

WDFW lands division staff are now certified as Technical Service Providers (TSP) for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

That means that private landowners who need wildlife habitat restoration work to qualify for federal Farm Bill and other programs can contract with WDFW, which in turn receives reimbursement.

See <http://techreg.usda.gov/> for more information about this new option.

## WDFW sells oil and gas leases

Oil and gas leases on WDFW lands are annually sold at public auction by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

This year WDFW received \$344,000 for those leases. The revenue is used for operation and maintenance of WDFW lands, and can be used to cover the cost of any needed environmental reviews. No surface occupancy can occur without additional environmental review and the preparation of a plan of operations by the leasing oil companies.



## Timber thinning helps wildlife *(continued from page 1)*

skeptical about a wildlife project.

"We're those crazy folks who leave mistletoe and witches' broom in trees for ruffed grouse and flying squirrel forage," Kuehn said.

But DNR state forester Pat McElroy was impressed.

"This is really a shining example of good management that deals with both fuel reduction and wildlife habitat needs," he said. "The Wildlife folks were obviously looking at wildlife benefits, but they sure knew what they were doing to reduce wildfire fuels, too. It's the kind of stewardship that we need to use federal funds for in the Healthy Forest Initiative."

Confer pursued that very notion when she applied for and received an \$88,740 Wildland Urban Interface federal grant, administered by DNR in Washington state, for additional thinning and prescribed burning work on 800 acres next year. Coupled with a \$13,600 donation from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for native plant seeding in the disturbed area, the project will be another winner.

"This is a rare opportunity for us to meet multiple goals," Confer said.

"We're improving deer and elk winter range in the short term by opening up the stands and releasing the shrub and grass layer, and in the longer term growing habitat for large pine-dependent species. At the same time, we're reducing the potential for catastrophic wildfire and epidemic disease spread."

Confer explained that an outbreak of spruce budworm is currently south of the L.T. Murray and moving north and the thinning helps increase the vigor and resistance of remaining trees.

McElroy has used pictures from the Joe Watt thinning project in presentations to the National Association of State Foresters, citing it as an example of what needs to be done at a landscape level.

"Any one landowner can make a difference on his or her property," McElroy said, "but wildfire can start anywhere and controlling its spread is dependent on good forest management across the landscape."

Kuehn planned the thinning to stimulate elk and deer winter range browse after the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission requested efforts to reduce the bill for winter feeding the area's large elk herd.

"It'll take several years to see if that really happens," Kuehn acknowledged, "but it was the impetus for trying some new things."

Kuehn calls the project an experiment, since it uses a wide range of different prescriptions (ie. varying distances between trees left standing, sizes of felled trees, prescribed burning in spring, fall and no burn units, re-vegetation with native seed).

He's also trying new ways to access grant funds with stipulations that once seemed like obstacles for wildlife management.

"We've traditionally left timbered buffers near roads to provide deer and elk hiding cover and minimize road hunting," Kuehn explained. "But federal funds designed to reduce wildfire risks require cutting right up to roads, where human-caused fires often start."

Kuehn's plans call for "feathering" timber stands out from roadsides and relying on shrubs like ceanothus ("buckbrush"), serviceberry and chokecherry to provide cover in the open areas.

Kuehn notes that what helps make the project economically feasible is today's market for smaller diameter trees. This year's contractor, for example, is taking the tops down to a four-inch diameter, leaving snags for woodpeckers and cavity nesters, and cutting the chipwood to sell to pulp mills.

Even that crazy notion of leaving mistletoe and witches' broom works.

"Different landowners have different objectives," McElroy said. "Doug recognizes the value of mistletoe and witches broom for wildlife, but it's managed on a small scale so that it doesn't spread and become an issue."

Confer welcomes those interested in viewing this unique thinning project.

"Come see how we're on the cutting edge here," she said (no pun intended!) Contact her at 509-925-6746 in Ellensburg to make tour arrangements.

## More LIP to come for private landowners

The first round of WDFW's Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) earlier this year resulted in the awarding of \$1.5 million to 80 private landowner projects across the state that help wildlife.

LIP is a competitive grant process that provides financial assistance to private landowners for the protection, enhancement or restoration of habitat to benefit "species at risk" on privately owned lands. For LIP eligibility, a species at risk is any fish or wildlife species that is federally or state listed as threatened or endangered, is proposed or is a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered, or is otherwise determined to be at risk by WDFW.

An additional \$199,000 from the Natural Resource Conservation Service for projects that benefit salmonids will fund another eight projects from the first round that fit the bill.

About \$760,000 will be available in the 2004/2005 LIP application period, scheduled to open September 1 and closing December 31, 2004. The focus for this next grant cycle will be small forest landowners for fish passage, near shore marine birds, and local watersheds with an emphasis on the Skagit watershed.

A downloadable application form with instructions is available on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/lip/>.

## Wildlife staff trained in wildfire safety

WDFW wildlife area managers and other staff are trained and equipped in wildfire safety to work in a coordination role with the fire-fighting entities that protect WDFW lands under MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding).



WDFW staff do not physically fight fires, but they provide logistical support to fire crews from the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), local fire districts, and federal agencies like the U.S. Forest Service. Training covers personal safety and equipment, including the use of a fire shelter.

## ***DNR land exchange proposal moving forward***

A land exchange proposal worked out between WDFW and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is slowly moving forward.

No lands will be traded before July 2005, however. That marks the start of a new state budget biennium and much is contingent on a \$1 million request from the 2005 Legislature to fund appraisals, title searches, timber cruisers, and environmental assessments.

WDFW currently leases 125,000 acres from DNR for about \$180,000 a year. About 90,000 of those acres lie in checkerboard inholdings on the Oak Creek, Wenas, L.T. Murray and Colockum wildlife areas in southcentral Washington.

Almost all of those checkerboard inholdings have been identified for potential transfer to WDFW in exchange for WDFW property in the same areas that are mostly at higher elevation and form in-holdings in primarily DNR ownerships.

The proposal has been reviewed by

WDFW's Land Management Advisory Council, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Board of Natural Resources. WDFW and DNR officials are now consulting with the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) and federal aid offices on funding options.

The land exchange proposal will undergo State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review and additional public involvement soon; watch for notices of opportunities to comment via both agencies' websites.

### ***Did you know . . .***

. . . recreational spending for fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing in Washington state totaled \$2.18 billion in 2001? That's according to the latest survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including all trip-related (fuel, food, lodging) and equipment expenditures. Local economies across the state gained \$350 million from hunting, \$854 million from fishing, and \$980 million from wildlife viewing.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will provide equal opportunities to all potential and existing employees without regard to race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, or Vietnam Era Veteran's status.

The department receives Federal Aid for fish and wildlife restoration.

The department is subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin or handicap. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any department program, activity, or facility, or if you want further information about Title VI or Section 504, write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240, or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia WA 98501-1091.